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ABSTRACT

This paper describes special education for children with visual impairments, hearing impairments, and intellectual impairments in China, especially in the city of Beijing. It reports a long history of special schools for individuals with visual impairments (since 1874), noting curriculum components at one school for the blind including braille, living skills, music, physical education, and vocational education. Developments in the curriculum for students with hearing impairments include a new emphasis on oral language teaching and reading/writing, reform of Chinese sign language to a phoneme-based system, and teaching methods that maximize use of residual hearing. Education for those with intellectual impairments, begun in 1981, is reported to have resulted in notable increases in the intelligence of participants to the degree that they can be transferred to regular primary school classes. Teaching methods for this population emphasize audiovisual methods, increased use of games, language development, personality development, self-care skills, and parent involvement. (DB)

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Special Education in Beijing: An Overview

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Special Education in Beijing:

An Overview

Special education is one aspect of compulsory education in China. Since the time of liberation, the government has paid great attention to education of children with special needs, and provided many services and supports such as school facilities, residential settings, and teachers, adopted effective measures of making scientific researchers, trained professional teachers, and popularized experiences which promote the development of special education.

In China, special education is divided into three parts: education with those with visual impairments, education for children with hearing impairments, and education for those with intellectual impairments. Special education in the city of Beijing is representative of the country of China. The purpose of this paper is to provide a detailed description of these special education programs.

Education for Individuals with Visual Impairments

There is a long history of schools for individuals who are visually impaired ("blind-child" education) in China. The first such school was established in Beijing in 1874 by a Scot, William Murray. It remained there until 1919. In 1920, it was re-established at the Balizhuang, West Beijing, and named "Qiming Blind School." Prior to 1949, all 300 students had graduated. At that time, its control was taken over by the government and formally re-named "Beijing Blind Child School." Since 1976, the Blind Child School has improved. A new school house was built, consisting of laboratories, storerooms for

equipment, and teaching materials, classrooms for hand work, a music room, and a library. A preparatory clinic for students looking to obtain employment after graduation was also established.

There have been a number of reforms of education for individuals with visual impairments. In the early years, there was only a primary school education department system of six years. In 1963 a junior school was established. In 1973 the educational system was extended to eight years (primary, five years; junior, three years). Since 1981, there has been a senior middle school with a two year vocational training program.

The curriculum is very similar to ones in a general school, but the content of teaching material is reduced, as they use braille in their instruction. The primary art course is replaced with one for living skills. In the junior high school, students are not required to study chemistry and foreign languages. In order to develop the intelligence of the students, the teaching of the courses of hand work, music and physical education are strengthened. In the vocational senior high school, except for studying basic cultural knowledge, the students' training in a career speciality is emphasized.

In order to explore the direction of teaching reform on making Chinese teaching for those with visual impairments, during 1982-83, with the help of the Capital Hospital, the history of eye disease and vision disease of blind students of the school was investigated. The results show that there was still some vision retained in 58.7 percent

of blind students. Because many could read with glasses, alternative teachings were implemented.

Because most of the students have at lease some reduced vision, they are organized into primary and secondary classes for learning Chinese words (this is called a "weak sight" class). Besides adding new instruments for assisting sight teaching, teachers organized students to do vision exercises to increase their usable vision.

According to the actual conditions of students, for going into the society and becoming able to support themselves, the schools provide an effective vocational educational program. Since 1960, there have been occupational courses given. During 1960-1983, twelve classes were organized treating 360,000 patients with a treatment efficiency of 92.5 percent.

There is physical education instruction in these schools for those with visual impairments. Before enrolling in school, most students with visual impairments had lacked physical exercise, their physiques were poor, their ability to manage themselves was also poor; some could not discriminate directions or go alone. After going to this school, the physiques of students are strengthened, improving their ability to be independent. The school especially emphasizes physical teaching, considering these courses to be a core subject. The components of this exercise program include walking, running, and jumping. With the physical improvement of students, the amount of exercises are increased in this physical course. Every day all teachers persist in

having physical training with students who are visually impaired. Leaders check it personally, promoting the school's physical activities. The special fund allocated from the government was used to level the field of exercises adding some new apparatus of physical exercise. According to actual situations of students, adding physical courses and early exercise each week after class in the afternoon develops various physical activities of small groups. Because of the attention paid to physical education teaching, the physical achievements of students increased rapidly. Since 1958, these students have gained excellent achievement in various international athletic competitions for individuals with disabilities.

Education for Individuals with Hearing Impairments

Before liberation, there were two public and private schools for individuals with hearing impairments (HI) in Beijing ("deaf-mute education"). During the early period of liberation, the Beijing schools for individuals with hearing impairments continued to reform the educational system, installing the preparation class of two years, formal class of six years, and technology class of one year. In 1956, it was decided to extend the study's fixed number of years to ten in those schools. After graduating, these students are placed in employment settings by civil administration departments in accordance with their acquired vocational skills.

There have been several reforms of the education for children with hearing impairments. The first example is the one of oral language teaching. Before liberation,

in most schools for individuals who were hearing impaired, there were primarily manual teaching methods. Although sigh language can help students to understand what teachers mean to some degree, it hinders students from learning and using oral and written language. This is especially true of those students who are postnatally deaf, and, because of using manual methods long term, the oral language that they could speak is gradually forgotten. For improving the quality of teaching, the government held a meeting of all schools to discuss the issues of teaching reform in 1954, emphatically choosing four such schools in Beijing, Shanghai, and Haerbin, to experiment with oral language teaching in new classes in order to train students in this way. In Beijing, two HI schools are the experimental schools. Their experiences first focused on assessing student to understand words, expressions, and short languages that are commonly used as soon as possible in order to simply communicate with someone in school and in social settings, opening the Chinese Initiation course to help students grasp basic written language. Thus, there are both some teaching activities of learning required words for students to pronounce and say, and the Chinese initiation that only requires them to understand the words. In this initiation process, they are not required to read and write in hopes of obtaining more knowledge after entering the school to make up for the shortcomings of oral language teaching. Second, the full usage of the visual and tactile senses help the student to discover the pronounced positions of each word, grasping the correct methods of pronunciation and

the strengthening of the skill training for reading and speech. They always pay attention to improving the reading capability of students in various subjects. The students judge the meanings of what the teacher says on the basis of the movement of the teacher's lips, and on the tension and relaxation of facial muscles. Proficiency of these skills can be formed through long-term training. Further, the emphasis is on strengthening the audiovisual teaching and fully using and developing the perceptual knowledge of students.

Since the teaching methods are appropriate for the characteristics of students with hearing impairments, the students made excellent progress with the oral experiment. Oral teaching rapidly became popular in the whole nation.

When progressing through the middle grades, the text becomes longer and its content becomes deeper. Its sentences become more complicated and the words of abstraction become more frequent so students' reading skills do not reach the proficiency level that all teaching materials require. It had some bad influences upon the teaching in classes and the students' enthusiasm was decreased. Thus, their academic achievement decreased. The investigative group of the Chinese Teaching Institute suggested that oral language should be the primary form and that other languages serving as supplementary forms but that both are needed to be combined together, thus attaching importance to fostering students' written language. Because of the improved oral teaching, the learning achievement of the student increased

significantly.

There is also Chinese sign language reform. In 1960, the government promulgated the chines finger signs, known as "phoneme letter," and then there were less letters. This helped reduce the complexities of pronunciation teaching. In order to improve the skills of finger signs, a teacher (Shenjiayin) in one of Beijing's HI schools, suggested a tentative idea of only performing one syllable at a time, augmenting twenty finger forms on the basis of "the scheme of Chinese finger letter," adopted to perform the initial consonant (of a Chinese syllable) by the right hand, to perform the simple vowel (of a Chinese syllable) by the right hand, and using the method of two hands to perform at the same time. Thus an entire syllable could be completed at once.

In 1974, Shen suggested a plan of "Chinese finger syllables" that was supported by leaders and colleagues at one of the HI schools. Since 1975, this plan has been applied among the new classes. The experience with it has proved that the image of finger syllables is stable and functional for spelling by having the finger forms of two hands displayed in front of the body at the same time which is convenient to identify and to spell carefully. The teacher performs the finger language, putting the hands near her mouth so that students can observe both the teacher's mouth and her finger forms. In some schools, teachers use the syllable finger forms to assist in instruction.

In Beijing, after physically examining some students, examiners found that about 70 percent of students had some residual hearing. The teachers and scientists decided

to experiment with the remaining hearing of students with hearing impairments, installing the classes to promote the sense of hearing. Teachers taught with a wireless microphone. In the teaching procedure, while observing the teachers degree of lip-rounding carefully, the students hear the sounds of teachers from the wireless microphones. Thus the teaching of oral language can have a greater impact on the students.

They implemented beginning vocational classes as well. It is one of our essential tasks to have the students learn labor skills for various occupations. In the 1950s, some HI schools in Beijing began installing labor skills training courses by providing various conditions. While some courses were canceled or compressed, others such as literacy were installed as common middle schools. An art design course was also added, strengthening the teaching of occupational technology. In 1984, specialities such as working with clothing, art design, and wood appeared in some schools. Therefore, the education of students with hearing impairments in Beijing is continually reformed for the purpose of enabling these students to support themselves.

Education for those with Intellectual Impairments

Education for those with intellectual impairments ("lack-wisdom education") is one part of common education primary education. Such programs in Beijing began in 1981. In 1983, the Department of Education in Beijing determined that students from primary schools, aged 7.5 - 9 who were assessed as mildly delayed were allowed to

attend the intellectual impairment classes. In order to understand the limits of intelligence and the degree of educability in children who were intellectually impaired, some schools also receive such students so that they can be compared with normal students. The length of education for the intellectual impairment program is eight years. By completing the program, the intelligence of students can be raised notably. When the level of intelligence reaches average, these students can be transferred into regular primary school classes. In short, education has developed these students' intelligence, has remedied the problems of body and mind, and has laid a solid foundation for the students to be able to support themselves in the future.

There are some special characteristics of children who are intellectually impaired. The child with intellectual impairments' ability to observe is lower; they cannot observe things systematically and purposefully, and their attention is not only brief but unstable. Their ability to retain information is slow, forgetfulness is quick, and remembering is not accurate or perfect. They think of something with some natures of concreteness, imagination, and surface. They do not analyze, synthesize or abstract and summarize. Their thought lacks initiative and flexibility and development of language is late. For the child with intellectual impairments, vocabulary is poor and their comprehension of the meaning of a word is incorrect and their sentences are both simple and disconnected.

The regulating function of language to their behavior is often weak. The personality development of children with intellectual impairments is more uneven

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because of possible pathology and their environment. Some children are reticent, timid and inferior, while others are more restless, are self-willed and their morale is unstable. In terms of caring and social skills and paying attention to courtesy, they are often more backward than the students who are not impaired.

Their ability to be independent is lacking. Apart from physiology conditions, many students who are intellectually impaired have little contact to their surroundings over a long period of time, or are overly protected by a parent. Both their life-ability and self-management thus may be poor.

There are a number of educational methods to respond to the above conditions. The teaching methods should fit the characteristics of children who are intellectually impaired. In a variety of teaching activities, audiovisual teaching should be strengthened because some concepts could be learned from observing the teaching aids of pictures and material objects. Teaching and learning activities should be changed into games, using such teaching ways to arouse the students' learning interest. We should use various ways to promote the development of language of the students who are intellectually impaired . We should have students use their hands, heads and mouths. Thus their spirits are not easily tired, they are more cooperative, and their attention is more easily focused. We should teach and encourage each student individually and employ various methods to reinforce knowledge they have gained and strengthen their retention.

We should help the student to develop a normal personality. The children who are intellectually impaired should be cared for and cherished. Small improvements should be affirmed and praised to encourage self-confidence, and they should be assured that they are always respected and cherished in the new classes and that their enterprising spirit is enlightened. The students should repeatedly practice, when carrying out the requests of school and teacher, good quality, morality, and behavior which is permeated though the individual character of students, in practicing repeatedly to form good habits. Great efforts should be made for holding extracurricular activities, promoting the students' intelligence as well as exerting a favorable influence on their nature.

We should teach these students the skills they need to care for themselves and to have a social life. They should be able to take care of themselves not only because of the requirement of self-life, but also in order to form good labor habits and morality. Training should focus on the most fundamental skills in their lives and help them to learn basic abilities when living independently, helping the students to form the labor habit.

Teachers should win parents' support and help. Conduct propaganda among parents on the correct methods of training and instructing children, and change some wrong ways to treat children. From those hands of their soul, behavior, and habit, choose some educational measures which are identical with school, impelling students

to enhance their intelligence. There should be some clear requests to fathers. Parents should assist teachers to expand some activities after school, positively coaching students, and carrying out training of compensation.

We should select and foster the teachers who teach these special students. In Beijing, many full-time teachers of students who are intellectually impaired are teachers selected from common classes. They have correct educational thought, and are patient, enthusiastic and solicitous of such children and have firm faith in them as well as a high sense of responsibility. The Department of Education often has held a course of lectures about education for students who are intellectually impaired, organized research on teaching, have teachers visit other places for absorbing good experiences, and strengthened teachers' ability of instruction.

Under effective training, the individual character of these students are developed normally, because the teachers give them much more help and encouragement, so their mood is happy, their disposition is sanguine, they are very willing to go to school, even when ill, and not willing to stay home to rest. They are interested in learning and can make great progress. Their ability to study is improved and is reflected in advances such as in thought, expression, and ability of calculation.

Conclusion

- For teachers of these special students, there should be attitudes of enthusiasm, patience, meticulosity, respect, protection and encouragement.

- According to various concrete characteristics of these students, such as bodily, psychological, intellectual, knowledgeable, and behavioral, we should treat them with distinction.
- The method of teaching is different from what the normal student needs, containing, for example, the special methods of blind-written language, and finger-language, as well as general methods of teaching students to read, listen, write and speak, using more teaching aids, teaching a few students by one teacher, and taking more class hours.
- The aim of education is to teach knowledge of practicality, adaptability, livelihood, thus making them able to live off the knowledge and skills, giving some contributions back to the society.

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